

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI  
COX COMMUNICATIONS CONNECT2COMPETE ANNOUNCEMENT  
NATIONAL PRESS CLUB**

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I read a quote on the Internet—so it must be accurate—that “Mondays are the potholes of life.” Well, at least for this Monday, that isn’t the case. This is a great way to start the week. Thank you to Pat Esser and Cox for sponsoring today’s event. And thanks to everyone who has worked to make Connect2Compete such a success. Your efforts have helped deliver digital opportunity to hundreds of thousands of Americans.

As it happens, I’m a Connect2Compete veteran. Almost three years ago, I was in Baton Rouge, Louisiana when Cox announced it was doubling the speed of the service it was offering through Connect2Compete. Today, Cox is announcing that the number of people taking advantage of this program has since more than doubled. That’s a lot more people taking charge of their future.

I not only applaud Connect2Compete’s commitment to closing the digital divide, I share it.

On my first day as Chairman, I said that making sure every American can benefit from the digital revolution was my highest priority. Over the past 20 months, I’ve visited 41 states and two territories and have logged over 11,000 road miles in various rental cars to explore the digital divide—what Internet access means to the families and towns on either side of that divide. These visits make clear why connecting all Americans is so important.

Take the veteran I spoke with recently during a visit to a VA hospital in Salt Lake City. He told me the mental health treatment he received from the VA helped him lose 80 pounds and get off blood pressure medication for the first time in 15 years. Here’s the catch. The veteran lived in Paradise, Texas—1,200 miles away. His consultations with the VA were made possible by telemedicine. That’s the power of a broadband connection.

Or take the eighth-grader I met a few weeks ago at a remote Tribal school in New Mexico’s Jemez Pueblo. Thanks in part to the FCC, her school had just gotten a reliable broadband connection. I asked her how she felt about it. A broad smile crossed her face as she explained that her class could now learn and do exams without having to worry about losing access and being bounced back into the analog age.

Or take the woman I met in rural Colorado who runs a cattle ranch. She explained how technology helps the business operate in so many ways—from tracking what the cattle eat every day to monitoring online auctions as they’re being sold.

On the flip side, being offline in 2018 means being unable to participate fully in our modern economy or civic life. Without Internet access, you can’t apply for many jobs. You’ll find it harder to grow a business. You won’t be able to educate your kids as easily. You won’t have online access to remote health care. You won’t be able to use precision agriculture on your farm or ranch. This is the cost of the digital divide.

Closing that divide will require both public sector and private sector leadership. With respect to the latter, Connect2Compete is setting the pace.

Connect2Compete is a bold private-sector initiative to tackle the issue of broadband affordability. Altogether, more than 400,000 low-income Americans have been connected through Cox’s efforts during the last six years. This program has had a major positive impact on people’s lives. According to one

survey, for example, most parents reported that their children's grades improved after they enrolled in the program.

Even better days are ahead. Today, Cox is pledging a significant financial commitment to further expand the program. This is a win for those Americans who get to enjoy the benefits of broadband—Americans who finally get to be participants in, instead of spectators of, the digital economy. I'm also grateful to Cox for its Digital Academy, which promotes digital literacy, another key factor for broadband adoption.

As I said earlier, closing the digital divide will require not just private sector leadership, but public sector efforts, too—which brings us to the FCC.

For our part, we've been busy. We're reforming the FCC's universal service programs, most notably the high-cost program, in order to leverage—not displace—private capital expenditures. We're aiming to spur network deployment in sparsely populated areas where the economic incentives for private investment alone don't exist. For example, about a month ago, we concluded our Connect America Fund Phase II reverse auction, which awarded about \$1.5 billion to augment private investment in order to bring broadband to 700,000 unserved homes and businesses.

We're also thinking creatively—for instance, by exploring a telehealth pilot program for low-income Americans with a focus on services delivered outside brick-and-mortar healthcare facilities. All across the nation, I've seen the potential of telemedicine to save lives and strengthen communities. So I'm excited to see where this initiative goes.

Here's the bottom line: Bridging the digital divide should be a national mission. Too many millions of Americans are still missing out on the benefits of the Internet age. Connect2Compete and the FCC can help change that. If we keep working together, America's digital future will be even brighter than it already is—even on Monday mornings.